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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000588

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: VP ATIKU RAILS AGAINST ADAMAWA JUDGEMENT, SUFFERS  
REBUKE FROM INFLUENTIAL NIGERIANS AND PARTISANS

REF: ABUJA 539

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, NOT FOR PUBLICATION ON THE  
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1. (U) SUMMARY: Following the March 24 nullification of Boni Haruna's 2003 Adamawa gubernatorial victory by the Adamawa State Election Tribunal, Vice President Atiku Abubakar angrily voiced his opposition to the ruling at a People's Democratic Party (PDP) rally in Yola. Unfortunately for Atiku, his invective was received poorly and has caused prominent Nigerians to question his commitment to the rule of law and his suitability as a Presidential candidate in 2007. END SUMMARY

2. (U) During a March 26 PDP rally in Yola, Vice President Atiku Abubakar lashed out against the Adamawa State Election Tribunal for its nullification of Boni Haruna's 2003 Adamawa gubernatorial election. Atiku accused Tribunal Chairman Kashim Zanna of bias and said the ruling was an attempt to steal Haruna's mandate and embarrass the Vice President and his protg Atiku went as far as to say he was ready "to insult, beat or slap anyone" who would try to take the gubernatorial seat away from the PDP.

3. (U) Despite statements from the Vice President's office accusing the press of misrepresenting his statements, reaction to Atiku's Yola tirade was swift and negative. Nigerian Bar Association President Wole Olanipekun called the Vice President's comments a threat to Nigeria's nascent democracy. Olanipekun went on to say that Atiku had no right to level such harsh criticism on the judiciary since the Vice President and the executive branch had so clearly failed the country. Going on, Olanipekun mused that the situation in Nigeria would be greatly improved if the executive branch was half as "sober, honest, transparent, sincere, humane and dispassionate" as the judiciary and wondered if Atiku would now blame the judiciary for the growing number of unresolved killings and assassinations littering the Nigerian political landscape.

4. (U) During an interview carried by the BBC Hausa Service, Yahaya Mohmoud, a respected Kaduna-based lawyer and former Chairman of the Nigerian Bar Association's Kaduna branch, called on the Vice President to retract his comments and publicly apologize to the Adamawa Tribunal and Justice Zanna. Mohmoud was critical of Atiku, saying he expected the Vice President to recognize that the ruling would demonstrate the independence of the judiciary and strengthen the rule of law. Such disregard for the rule of law coming from a man with Presidential aspirations did not portend well for Nigeria.

5. (U) Opposition partisans wasted no time in criticizing the Vice President. Former Osun State Governor and Alliance for Democracy (AD) party leader Bisi Akande strongly condemned Atiku and hailed the judiciary as the one branch of the government free from the control of the PDP "thugs." All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) National Secretary Sani El-Katuzu also took advantage of the opportunity to criticize Atiku saying his comments revealed

he was not a true democrat and that he had not intention of supporting the rule of law when it did not suit his needs.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: While criticism of the Vice President by opposition party members is not necessarily noteworthy, the dim view of Atiku's comments taken by Olanipekun, Mohmoud and other influential Nigerians, both Northerners and Southerners, is indicative of Atiku's unpopularity. Already saddled with the failure of the Obasanjo administration to improve the lot of the average Nigerian, it is difficult to imagine Atiku emerging as a successful PDP standard bearer in the 2007 election if he is also labeled as undemocratic and disinterested in the rule of law.

END COMMENT.  
ROBERTS